3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

The common people of Haiti are continually creating [his phrase is much more revealing: "en gestation de"] *loa*, or new Vodoun "saints." Popular tradition, long before independence, refers to a certain Don Pédro, a being of flesh and blood who from the Spanish end of the island had come at a certain period to live in the mountains of the commune of Petit-Goâve. This Don Pédro was the man who introduced into Haiti that violent dance which, by corruption, the people call "the pétro." Upon his death, Don Pédro came to occupy an honorable place in the Vodoun pantheon, bringing in his train a whole group of progeny, such as Jean-Philippe Pétro, Criminel Pétro, etc.[21]

As might be logically deduced, certain powerful ancestors become deified as Pétro loa.

It would require field trips into every district of Haiti to compile a full list of the various loa who receive homage from Haitians; some appear to have only a local following, others are honored over a wide district, and a few are reverenced throughout the country. If Vodun ever reached the stage of founding a seminary of sacred theology—a highly improbable event—one of its most imperative functions would be the collection, classification, and explanation of the attributes of the hundreds of loa, specifying whether they are Haitian or African in origin, Pétro or Rada, powerful or complaisant, inclined prevailingly to benevolence or to malice. Lacking such a proper catalogue, it will suffice to mention only the most commonly accepted figures. In reflecting upon the characteristics of these gods, the well-informed reader will be struck by the numerous parallels to divinities of other faiths so remote that Haitians could not possibly have known of them; similar emotional needs seem to produce similar deities to satisfy them.[22]

Legba is the name of the loa most frequently invoked, not because he is the most powerful, but because he is the interlocutor between man and his gods. Before any ceremony may begin, Legba is addressed: "*Papa Legba, ouvri barrière pour nous.*" If he is not first worshiped, the other deities may not come to possess the people. Legba guards every door and gate, every highway and crossroads. He is still an important god in modern Dahomey, where his attributes are much the same as in Haiti. The people feel no necessity of

21. Dorsainvil, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

22. Classical anthropologists might have called this phenomenon "parallelism"; the word is accurate enough if only similarity, not identity, be understood.